

This paper is aimed at considering the message of the Holy Father Francis on solidarity in the encyclical letter “Fratelli tutti” with special reference to the role of women in its implementation. In this context it is important to review the aspects of solidarity according to the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* and consider the forms through which women express solidarity with reference to the response to COVID-19 pandemic.

In chapter 3 “Envisaging and engaging the open world” of the encyclical letter “Fratelli tutti,” the Holy Father Francis puts special emphasis on “the value of solidarity”. He refers to the New Testament, where is described one fruit of the Holy Spirit *agathosyne* (cf. Gal 5:22), the Greek word that expresses attachment to and pursuit of the good. The Holy Father explained that “it suggests a striving for excellence and what is best for others, their growth in maturity and health, *the cultivation of values and not simply material wellbeing*” (FT 112). Our society needs to assure that *values are passed on and cultivated in new generations*. Otherwise, our modern economy will remain filled with selfishness, violence, corruption, indifference and individualism.

Solidarity is seen under two complementary aspects: that of a *social principle* and that of an *authentic moral virtue*, a “*firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all*”. This definition was formulated by Pope John Paul II in 1987, in his social encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. Solidarity rises to the rank of a fundamental *social virtue* since it exists in the sphere of justice. It is a virtue directed *par excellence* to the *common good* and is found in “a commitment to the good of one’s neighbour with the readiness, in the Gospel sense, to ‘lose oneself’ for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him, and to ‘serve him’ instead of oppressing him for one’s own advantage” (cf. Mt 10:40-42, 20:25; Mk 10:42-45; Lk 22:25-27).

The term “solidarity” is challenging in the present economic climate and the mentality that it creates. The deep cause of the current crisis is of a fundamental ethical nature, which has given rise to this “allergy” to ideas like solidarity, fair allocation of commodities, and work as a goal. The reason for this is that no one has succeeded or does not wish to suc-

ceed in really learning how these ethical principles can foster economic values, such as establishing virtuous dynamics in manufacturing, labor, the economy, and finance itself. Nowadays it is important to combine the theoretical and practical aspects, thought and experience in the field.

The critical field where this issue plays out is the businessman’s conscience. The Christian businessman, in particular, is challenged to always align the world in which he works with the Bible, and the Gospel asks him to prioritize the human being and the greater good, doing his best to provide opportunities for dignified work. Naturally, it cannot work on its own, but only if shared with others who hold the same ethical foundations, spreading the net as widely as possible.

In the encyclical letter “Fratelli tutti” Pope Francis firstly addressed people responsible for education and formation, cultivation of “*solidarity*” as a moral virtue and *social attitude* in particular. He says that “the first place where the values of love and fraternity, togetherness and sharing, concern and care for others are lived out and handed on” is in the family (FT 114). The particular attitude and devotion with which a mother teaches her children is unique and truly beautiful.

Family is the place where the new economy can be born and brought up. In the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, the social responsiveness of families is described. Families cultivate societal values, individually or in associations, expressed in manifestations of solidarity and sharing, not only among families themselves, but also in various forms of participation in social and political life. Solidarity belongs to the family as a constitutive and structural fact because a family is based on love.

This solidarity can take the form of service and attention to those who live in poverty and destitution, to orphans, the sick, the elderly, to those who are grieving, in doubt, lonely or abandoned. One who has an attitude based on solidarity is open to reception, custody or adoption, knowing how to interpret every situation

of difficulty to institutions, so that they may intervene in accordance with their specific purposes.

The relationship between the family and economic life is crucial. The ‘economy’ was born of domestic work, where family is seen as a unit of production and a center of life. But it can be also seen as an actor, guided by the logic of sharing and solidarity between generations. A very special relationship links the family and work, as John Paul II reminded us: “The family constitutes one of the most important terms of reference for shaping the social and ethical order of human work” (*Laborem Exercens* 10). This relationship is based on the person’s right to the rewards of an occupation and affects the individual not only as a human, but also as a family member who is understood to be a part of “domestic society.”

The commitment that the family makes in society supporting economically its members, including those who don’t work, is significant. The family has an incredible capacity for solidarity that is a huge gift to society. Moreover, the family’s commitment furthers work-related preparation and encouragement for career decisions: “The values of freedom, mutual respect and solidarity can be handed on from a tender age...” (FT 114). As values and attitudes are formed at a very early age under the care of parents (Francis 2020b), including basic economic understanding of little children, that can fix unconscious bias at an early age, resulting in more solidarity cooperation of future generations.

In the encyclical letter the Holy Father mentions the term “solidity” and “born of the consciousness that we are responsible for the fragility of others as we strive to build a common future” (FT 115). This “solidity” is particularly typical for women. Solidarity finds concrete expression in service, which can take a variety of forms in efforts to care for others. And service in great part means “caring for vulnerability, for the vulnerable members of our families, our society, our people” (FT 115). Many women set aside their own interests and desires, ser-

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ving and caring for our common home and those who are the most vulnerable. Solidarity as exercised by women has a variety of forms depending on local needs and cultural traditions, but any of its manifestations is an effective way of confronting individualism and acting in terms of community.

Women have created alternative forms of unity to organize support and collaboration with the 'other', as "service to others". *Active solidarity* can be not just a modern kind of solidarity or a new form of intersectionality, but a method for practicing intersectional solidarity that recognizes oppression as constituted by multiple and interacting social structures; this type of solidarity is an aspirational ideal for organizing society anew. Active solidarity is a practice that acknowledges and consciously tries to reduce the impact of unequal power (Tormos 2017).

Feminism, defined as the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men (Oxford Learner's Dictionary 2021), holds that solidarity and social justice are vital for our society. In discussions of solidarity, humanity is often divided into separate groups by identity, including ethnicity, age, sexuality and country. Yet, it is essential to value others and unite with them, without highlighting differences, as solidarity is at the core of social action of women.

There are not many feminists theorizing about solidarity. And yet, any feminism must contain an analysis of a shared reality, a knowledge or understanding that should be paired with a more or less shared socio-economic project. The COVID-19 virus represents a common challenge to the whole world and, like never before, reminds us of our interdependence.

According to a UN Women report (UN Women 2020a), in 2021 435 million women and girls will be living on USD 1.90 or less, pushed into extreme poverty. Due to the pandemic, women are at higher risk of poverty than men, as they get lower wages and do more unofficial work that provides poor protection against economic shocks. Women are losing more jobs than men, and the poor and marginalized groups of women are also facing a high risk of COVID-19 transmission and fatalities (UN Women 2020a). The COVID-19 pandemic is not just a health issue, but a real shock to our societies and economies, and women are at the heart of care and response.

Even though women have been in-

fluenced most, at the same time women have been leading in sustaining and recovering their communities, expressing solidarity, particularly in rural areas (UN Women 2020b). As the COVID-19 pandemic started spreading in China, in the rural village of Xiaruoyao, in the northwestern Qinghai Provincerural, women farmers volunteered to stop the spread. Every day 45-year-old Yan Shenglian worked on improving awareness about the COVID-19, the importance of avoiding large gatherings and maintaining social distance, and also checking the temperature of anyone going in or out of the village. This example was later taken up by other women and implemented in other local communities around the world.

Solidarity is also expressed by sharing harvest in rural areas with the ones in need and caring for children and the sick during the pandemic, and these are commonly done by women. Thus, this topic is of a specific interest to the village "Women for Economy" in the movement of the young economists, entrepreneurs and changemakers, the "Economy of Francesco". Nowadays it is particularly important to follow the message of the Holy Father Francis on the value of solidarity to respond to the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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